

SA to launch new isotope facility to fight cancer

Higher education, science and innovation minister, Blade Nzimande, will on Friday, 9 June, launch the South African Isotope Facility (Saif), supported and funded by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI).



Source: [Pexels](#)

With cancer expected to become the leading cause of death on the African continent by 2030, according to the World Health Organisation, the department said Saif is a response to the growing challenge.

Saif, managed by the department's entity - the National Research Foundation (NRF) - is a flagship programme at iThemba Labs in Cape Town.

“The facility will conduct advanced research and training capacity, as well as increase the production capacity for radioisotopes, including new-generation novel radioisotopes. In addition, Saif has acquired a dedicated cyclotron with associated infrastructure for producing radioisotopes, thus freeing the existing separated sector cyclotron for full-time research and training,” said Nzimande.

Radioisotope therapy is used in treating cancer by targeting cancerous cells, while causing minimal damage to surrounding healthy cells.

iThemba Labs has produced radioisotopes for the local and international nuclear medicine and research fraternity for more

than 30 years.

It is one of only a few places in South Africa where the complete manufacturing process to produce medicine takes place. It includes production facilities, chemical processing, quality assurance and control, filling and packaging under sterile conditions, and end-to-end logistics, marketing and sales.

“The research facility also supplies certain medical isotopes for South African nuclear medicine clinics, which cannot be supplied by anyone else or even imported now,” said the minister.

Currently, about 5 000 South African patients a year benefit from the supply, and it is expected that these numbers could increase by a factor of five to seven with the increase in production capacity through Saif and the availability of a new cohort of isotopes.

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